

**Vladimir Markov and Russian Primitivism: A Charter for the Avant-Garde.** By Jeremy Howard, Irēna Bužinska, and Z. S. Strother. Burlington: Ashgate, 2015. xxvi, 294 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Plates. Photographs. Figures. \$119.95, hard bound.

This is the first English-language monograph on the Latvian artist, photographer, critic, and theorist Vladimir Markov (Voldemārs Matvejs, 1877–1914), an essential influence on the development of the Russian avant-garde. Born in Riga, Markov spent much of his creative career in St. Petersburg and Paris, joining forces with radical painters such as Varvara Bubnova, Pavel Filonov, and Ol'ga Rozanova and championing the esthetic principles of the Union of Youth—the St. Petersburg society of painters and poets often remembered for its productions of *Victory over the Sun* and *Vladimir Maiakovskii* in December 1913. Although Markov was himself a painter of distinction, his talents as a theorist and photographer deserve immediate recognition, and this monograph grants special attention to these activities.

*Vladimir Markov and Russian Primitivism* is divided into two sections, scholarly essays (a general introduction, Jeremy Howard's "'The Treasure-House of World Beauty': Markov and Russian Primitivism Writ Large," Irēna Bužinska's "Markov's Development as a Theoretician" and "Markov's Legacy: Photographs for *Art of Northern Asia*," and Z. S. Strother's "The Politics of Face in the African Art Photography of Vladimir Markov") and Markov's major treatises in English translation. The volume directs attention primarily to his research into "primitive" art, which culminated in pioneering explications of Black art and the art of Easter Island as well as appreciations of Chinese ceramics and poetry. This focus is of paramount importance inasmuch as Markov found his primary source of critical and creative inspiration in the pagan idols of the Congolese, Fijian, and Nanai peoples which he accessed in Russian and European museums, because, as Bužinska affirms, for Markov "primitive art" "served as a most powerful and inspirational example for the broadening of the boundaries of creativity" (59). In this sense, Markov was among the first to regard Black African figures, for example, outside cultic function and to analyze them in terms of intrinsic values such as rhythm, weight, form, line, and texture (*faktura*), the latter quality being of particular importance to him. Indeed, in 1914 Markov even published an entire treatise on texture, reinforcing, if not anticipating, the cubo-futurists' and constructivists' fascination with the texture or finish of the artifact (as shown by David Burliuk, Aleksei Kruchenykh, and Aleksei Gan, for example). More latently, perhaps, Markov's *Faktura* may have informed Filonov's, Kazimir Malevich's, and Vladimir Tatlin's attitudes toward the processing and treatment of the material surface. In any case, Markov's ideas on the aesthetic ingredients of the artifact, the primitive, and the need to insert scientific methods into the analysis and evaluation of the work of art brought him close to many other avant-gardists, not least Natal'ia Goncharova, Vasilii Kandinskii, and Mikhail Larionov.

While the articles by Howard (on primitivism), Bužinska (on Markov's photography), and Strother (on physiognomies) are lucid and very informative, a particular value of this book lies in the inclusion of Markov's writings (most appearing in English for the first time). Richly contextualized and annotated, texts such as "On the 'Principle of Weightiness' in African Sculpture" demonstrate not only a rare intellectual sophistication but also an unfaltering courage in discussing "marginal" subjects, as in *Iskusstvo negrov* (Negro Art); questioning the conventional hierarchies of high and low ("Principles of the New Art"); and arguing that "primitive" art may not be "savage" or "backward" but, on the contrary, elevated and highly complex. As Howard explains, Markov's "reach was global . . . and comprised of a visual-textual proposal for a globalized taxonomy of art that transcends the more hegemonic inflec-

tions of many of his contemporaries” (25). In order to promote his intrinsic method, Markov made liberal recourse to photography, becoming a pioneer in the use of close-up to highlight the material and grain of wooden artifacts. As Stropher emphasizes, in using the camera to record examples of “primitive” art and to document their formal components rather than their functional destinations, Markov was “iconoclastic” for his time (129), both in collocating vernacular, indigenous, and cubo-futurist art and in anticipating the formalist and structuralist methods of criticism.

With an extensive bibliography, copious reproductions of Markov’s own photographs, and useful comparative illustrations, *Vladimir Markov and Russian Primitivism* is a major contribution to twentieth-century art history. The authors are to be congratulated on their bold, synthetic appreciation of one of the most fascinating luminaries of Russian and European modernism.

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***Voiceless Vanguard: The Infantilist Aesthetic of the Russian Avant-Garde.*** By Sara Pankenier Weld. Studies in Russian Literature and Theory. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014. xviii, 304 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Figures. \$45.00, hard bound.

This monograph presents a persuasive and important argument for the role of the child in the aesthetics of the Russian avant-garde. Sara Pankenier Weld’s study goes well beyond her four main subjects—Mikhail Larionov, Aleksei Kruchenykh, Viktor Shklovskii, and Daniil Kharms—and even beyond Russian art and literature to the nature of avant-garde art in general. It should therefore be of great interest to scholars and students of late imperial and early Soviet Russian culture, avant-garde art and literature, and childhood studies and children’s literature.

Through meticulous scholarship, archival research, and close analysis, *Voiceless Vanguard* demonstrates the importance of the child to Larionov’s art, Kruchenykh’s and Kharms’s writings, and Shklovskii’s literary and aesthetic theory. These four avant-gardists’ engagements with children and children’s literature and art are known, at least in outline. For example, Weld builds on the work of Gerald Janecek, who also connects *zaum* (trans-sense) poetry to a contemporaneous interest in children’s language, and Gleb Pospelov, who likewise uses the term *infantile primitivism* to analyze Larionov’s turn toward abstraction. Weld synthesizes such disparate scholarship, offers new and compelling evidence for the depth of each artist’s or writer’s engagement with children, and thereby develops a novel thesis that places the child at the center of the history of the Russian avant-garde. She demonstrates the centrality of the child not only to neoprimitivism, cubo-futurism, Russian formalism, and OBERIU literature but also to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian culture at large, from Lev Tolstoi to Russian symbolism.

Weld tracks the avant-garde’s use of the child from what she terms the “infantile primitivism” of Larionov and Kruchenykh to the “infantilist aesthetics” of Shklovskii and Kharms. Whereas infantile primitivism largely objectifies the child and children’s art and writing, the infantilist aesthetic “first recognizes the child’s subject position . . . and then comes to acknowledge the child as a subject of its own” (106). Her account of the development of infantilism from the child as object to the child as subject reflects her analysis of the child’s double position within avant-garde art as a figure for the preverbal “unity of signifier and signified” and for the naive speaking subject who encounters the “limits of language,” and highlights the “divide between signifier and signified” (210).